



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 91

COAST GUARD DIVERSITY STRATEGIC THEMES

First and foremost, if we expect all Team Coast Guard members to believe the Coast Guard truly values diversity, all leaders must constantly and consistently convey the message. These are strategic themes we all should use in holding a "dialogue on diversity" at our units and staffs.

DIVERSITY ENCOMPASSES ALL OUR DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES. While this may appear self-evident to those familiar with diversity, many people still believe diversity applies only to women and minorities. It does not...it encompasses all our differences and similarities, including such things as religion, marital status, occupation, leadership style, age, and ideas. Others believe it is an affirmative action program. Again, it is not. DOT Order 3200.1, Diversity Management Guidance, states, "Diversity management is creating and maintaining a work environment...[that] does not advantage or disadvantage any member of the work force." This is, perhaps, the most important message.

WE MUST MAKE OUR DIVERSITY WORK FOR US IN A MOST COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT. Some may view diversity as a cost or obstacle. Yet research consistently has shown a diverse group of people using their creativity, innovation, intuition, and brain power can do a substantially better job in today's constantly changing world than a group of similar members. Diverse groups bring with them new perspectives about how to actually do the work - how to design processes, reach goals, frame tasks, create effective teams, communicate ideas, and lead. By unleashing this potential, leaders ensure their people bring more of their whole selves to the workplace and identify more fully with the work they do, setting in motion a powerful combination for better mission performance. Due to our small size, we can't afford any member of our team not contributing to his or her full capability. We must capitalize on the experiences and ideas of every Team Coast Guard member if we are to succeed in this resource-austere environment. Diversity gives the Coast Guard a competitive edge and allows us to attract and retain the best America has to offer. Neither the armed forces nor corporate America will be able to staff their organizations in the 21st century unless they hire the ever-increasingly diverse population America has to offer. Diversity is not a "nice to do" Human Resources program -- it is a competitive necessity.

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IS NOT A HEADQUARTERS PROGRAM. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH AND EVERY TEAM COAST GUARD MEMBER. Individual behavior and actions combine to create the environment in which we work. While leaders must articulate a vision, build commitment, and enforce compliance, it is up to each of us to remain vigilant, demonstrate desired behavior, and work diligently to create an environment that nurtures mutual respect and understanding and values differences. If we hear racial slurs, sexist jokes, or inappropriate comments, we must remark. If we see discriminatory actions occur, we must

intervene. We must consciously consider diversity-related issues when making decisions and do the right thing.

OPEN, HONEST COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL AT ALL COAST GUARD LEVELS. We all have biases and prejudices, and discussing them makes us feel uncomfortable. Differences will not disappear because we ignore them. Honest, open dialogue is critical to progress. We must talk about our concerns and perceptions without blaming or accusing. We must respect and take seriously others' opinions, perceptions, and experiences. We must listen without judging, and above all else, we must keep an open mind and a sense of humor.

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT (CREATING A WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT TREATS ALL MEMBERS WITH DIGNITY AND GIVES THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE FULLY TO MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT) IS CONSISTENT WITH OUR CORE VALUES.

Honor - We demonstrate uncompromising ethical conduct and moral behavior in all our personal actions.

Respect - We treat each other with fairness, dignity, and compassion.

Devotion to Duty - We are committed to the Coast Guard and accomplishing its missions.

The most humble job, done well, merits respect!

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO FEEL WELCOME AND APPRECIATED IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE CULTURE AND WHAT IS REQUIRED OF THEM TO SUCCEED. Team Coast Guard members work in an environment that requires them to adapt -- flexibly and quickly. Success often is difficult for those who aren't familiar with the military service culture or don't know the "unwritten rules." Diversity management and mentoring go hand in hand. Formal and informal mentoring is essential for Team Coast Guard members to succeed in our organization. This requires a commitment from each of us to support, counsel, and guide junior personnel, particularly those from non-majority groups, to help them maximize their personal and professional growth.

WE MUST INTEGRATE DIVERSITY INTO OUR ORGANIZATIONAL FABRIC. Diversity management is a journey without an end. Eradicating racism, sexism, and other "-isms" is a long-term struggle requiring continuous change and growth. We must integrate and blend smart diversity management into existing programs, making it an integral part of our planning process. We must mainstream it into our training programs until it becomes second nature to us in the way we conduct business.

SMART DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT IN THE FUTURE. The future will bring globally inter-linked economies, revolutions in maritime transportation and information systems, and changing national security concerns. More than ever, America will call on the Coast Guard to serve the national interest, both at home and abroad. Because our missions bring us into close proximity with the public we serve and the more than 100 nations we work with, we must be sensitive to cultural differences to ensure we keep the public's trust and succeed in a multi-cultural environment. Broadening our perspectives will increase not only our creativity and productivity but our understanding of the issues as well.

You may want to review Flag Voices 85 & 86 on "Building a House for Diversity." How do these strategic themes relate to our observations of the elephant and giraffe?

Our diversity internet site has a wealth of information on mentoring, leadership and career development and diversity management efforts. See it at <http://cgweb.uscg.mil/g-wtl/divcen/index.htm> or <http://www.uscg.mil/diversity.htm>.

DIVERSITY'S BOTTOM LINE: THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS.

Regards, FL Ames

P.S. A resource for Coast Guard men and women seeking information on or assistance with diversity related issues is the Office of Leadership and Diversity's toll-free phone line: 1-800-242-9513. Originally established as the Women's Information Phone Line, this number may now be used to contact the Gender Policy Advisor, Ethnic Policy Advisor, Career Development Advisor Program Manager, and Mentor Program Coordinator. Although calling the Diversity Information Phone Line does not constitute bypassing the chain of command, personnel are encouraged to seek answers or resolve issues through the chain of command before calling. Callers may remain anonymous, but must provide a means of contact if they leave a message that requires a response. The phone line is staffed weekdays from 0800 - 1630 except Federal holidays, and voice mail may be left when the line is busy or unattended.



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